

a smoke, to recover from their amazement. Suddenly the other boat lurched as violently. One of the crew was thrown into the water. The two boats decided to get steaming. Later it was found the cause of the trouble was a calf whale; its mother had been harpooned by one of the Picton chasers, and the little fellow (of about 30 ft.) was searching the seas for its parent. A flip of its tail, the crew reckoned, would have smashed the boats to smithereens.

It took more than two hours to the spot in the Middle Straits Bank where we were to try our luck. But it's more than luck. Small areas of water have been found to be the most consistently successful. Landmarks on both Islands give the positions; when it's foggy or visibility is poor the crews know they may as well stay at home. If the lines aren't dropped in the exact spots there probably won't be a fish caught.

One hundred and twenty fathoms of line and 30 fathoms of hooks weighted with lead sink into the water. One of the crew has a long gaff to keep off the large gulls, which seem to think a baited hook will make a tasty morsel. Attached to the end of the line is an inflated canvas buoy, as coloured and as large as a beach ball; it is to mark the position of the line which is left while the other lines are set.

Groper was the fish we were hoping for. They are caught during October, November, December, June, and July. Ling, which is found in much deeper water—350 fathom lines are used—is the main catch during winter. The Cook Strait banks were found about eighteen years ago, and ever since they have been fished continually and successfully. So successfully, in fact, that often through the years the fishermen have not been able to market their hauls; they have had to dump them. These days the position is the opposite: demand exceeds supply.

In an hour all the lines had been cast, nine buoys were bobbing in the swell in a radius of about half a mile. It was noon and we were very hungry. But we had brought no lunch, so we would have nothing to eat until after our return about eight o'clock. I reckoned that by five o'clock I would be about starved to death.

I didn't know that by five o'clock I would be nearly dead. But not from hunger.

A wind light from the north. But was it so light? It was blowing my hair, the deck was slipping, salt spray kept us in the shelter of the dinghy. Occasionally a wave snatched by the wind from the swell broke over the stem of the "Wild Duck." We shared a cheese sandwich given to us by one of the crew. Soon we would be hauling in the first line. I wished the wind would stop, that the deck would be still if only for a minute.

A winch run from the engines is used to haul aboard the heavy weight of line. It used to be done by hand; it must have been tough work with anything up to 700 yards of line, and perhaps thirty or forty heavy fish. Dangerous work, too, especially in a wallowing sea when the boat could give a lurch to pull the line quickly through the men's hands, the large sharp hooks with it. There have been some serious accidents.



Chugging and whining from the winch brought the line on board. Yards and yards of it, but still no hooks, no fish. Minutes passed. Nearly a quarter of an hour. At last something white dipped through the water: the first of the haul, the first that hadn't got away. We strained our eyes. A beauty, 3 ft. and more. A groper. Hooks followed, the bait gone. Another fish. And another. Soon a pile. Fifteen were lying on the deck when the lead weight was aboard.

Fifteen fish, eight varieties—groper, ling, bass, shark, conger eel, blind eel, barracouta, a large skate. By the time they had been hauled steadily through